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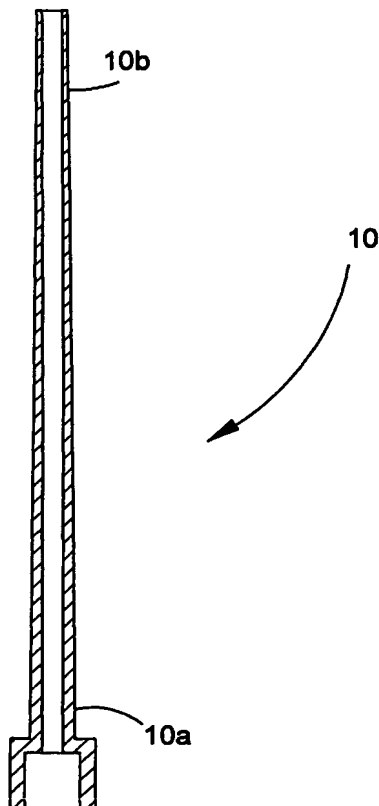
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[Continued on next page]

(54) Title: EMITTER TUBE FOR IRRIGATION SYSTEM



(57) Abstract: The invention provides an emitter tube (10) for an irrigation system, the tube being of resiliently flexible material having a base inlet end adapted to be mounted and a free outlet end adapted to be un-mounted, the arrangement being such that, with liquid flowing at a sufficient rate through the emitter tube, hydraulic forces exerted by the flowing liquid on the tube cause the outlet end continuously to move about, further having a base section (10a) and an end section (10b) downstream from the base section when the end section is of greater flexibility than the base section.

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*For two-letter codes and other abbreviations, refer to the "Guidance Notes on Codes and Abbreviations" appearing at the beginning of each regular issue of the PCT Gazette.*

**EMITTER TUBE FOR IRRIGATION SYSTEM****Field of the Invention**

5    **THIS** invention relates to an emitter tube suitable for an irrigation system.

**Description of Prior Art**

The Applicant's United States Patent No. 4,915,312 discloses an irrigation system  
10    which includes a sprinkler device for liquids comprises an emitter tube of resiliently  
flexible material having a base inlet end adapted to be mounted and a free outlet end  
adapted to be un-mounted, the arrangement being such that, with liquid flowing at a  
sufficient rate through the emitter tube, hydraulic forces exerted by the flowing  
liquid on the tube cause the outlet end continuously to move about. The emitter  
15    tube is mounted on a fitting which has a flow passage there through which leads  
into the emitter tube, the flow passage having, at its inlet end, a pair of grooves  
which lead tangentially into the flow passage. These tangentially arranged grooves  
impart a swirling motion to water entering the emitter tube. A pop-up sprinkler is  
also disclosed in which the emitter tube is mounted on a plunger which is  
20    displaceable in a barrel, the emitter tube protruding through an opening at the end  
of the barrel.

This system is further disclosed in the Applicant's United States Patent No. 4,856,552 which relates to a flow regulating device suitable for use in the above system.

- 5 The specifications of these U.S.A. patents are incorporated into this specification by way of reference. It has been found that the emitter tube which is disclosed in the above United States patents, lends itself to advantageous modifications for certain applications.
- 10 For example, in certain applications a greater radius of throw of irrigation water is desirable and it has been found that the emitter tube can be modified to achieve such a results.

- Also for example a more even water distribution with a single sprinkler as well as
- 15 water distribution with sprinklers laid out on the standard group spacing could be achieved by modifying the emitter tube. Further for example where the size of the droplets of irrigation water is to be controlled, the emitter tube could likewise be modified to achieve such a result.

20 **Object of the Invention**

It is accordingly an object of the present invention to provide a novel emitter tube

of the type disclosed in the above United States patents wherein the frequency of oscillation of the tube in use is reduced for a given specific flow rate.

A further object of the invention is to provide an emitter tube having a greater  
5 radius of throw of irrigation water.

A further object of the invention is to provide a sprinkler system having an improved distribution with a single sprinkler, as well as an improved water distribution with sprinklers laid out on standard grid spacings.

10

A further object of the invention is to provide an emitter tube which is capable of producing droplets of irrigation liquid of a controlled size.

#### Summary of the Invention

15

A resiliently flexible emitter tube of the type described in United States Patent No. 4,915,312 having a base section and an end section downstream from the base section wherein the end section is of greater flexibility than the base section.

20 In one arrangement the emitter tube is characterized in that a base section of the emitter tube has a wall thickness which is greater than the end section of the tube. Preferably the wall thickness of the tube will taper evenly from the base thereof

towards the free end thereof. Alternatively, the wall thickness of the emitter tube could be stepped at one or more intervals along its length so as progressively to reduce in wall thickness.

- 5 In a further embodiment of the invention the emitter tube will comprise an end section, an intermediate section and a base section, and the arrangement will be one wherein the intermediate section is of greater flexibility than the base section and the end section is in turn of greater flexibility than the intermediate section. In this arrangement the intermediate section could thus define a waist portion of reduced  
10 diameter.

In one embodiment in accordance with the invention the inner diameter of the tube could remain substantially constant, while the outer profile of the tube will reduce in wall thickness from the base thereof towards the free end thereof.

15

Thus in one example where the tube has length of 177mm, the outer diameter thereof at the base could be 10mm, and the outer diameter thereof at the free end could be 6mm, with the tube tapering evenly between the base and free end. The inner diameter of the tube could be 5mm in the above case. These dimensions  
20 could vary widely and the invention is in no way limited in this regard.

A further alternative provides for the inner passage of the tube to taper outwardly

from a larger diameter at the base to a smaller diameter at the end thereof.

### **Brief Description of the Drawings**

5 A further features of the invention will appear from the preferred embodiment which is described below purely by way of example with reference to the accompanying drawing wherein:

Figure 1 is a schematic sectioned elevation of an emitter tube arrangement in  
10 accordance with the invention;

Figure 2 is a schematic sectioned elevation of an irrigation lead including the emitter tube of Figure 1; and

15 Figure 3 is a schematic section elevation of a different embodiment of the emitter tube in Figure 1.

### **Detailed Description of Drawings**

20 US Patent No. 4,915,312 which is referred to above and discloses an irrigation system which includes a sprinkling device for liquids comprises an emitter tube 10

of resiliently flexible material having a mounted base 10a and an unmounted outlet end 10b, the arrangement being such that, with liquid flowing at a sufficient rate through the emitter tube 10, hydraulic forces exerted by the flowing liquid on the tube cause the outlet end 10b continuously to move about. The emitter tube is

5 mounted on a fitting which has a flow passage there through which leads into the emitter tube, the flow passage having, at its inlet end, a pair of grooves which lead tangentially into the flow passage. These tangentially arranged grooves impart a swirling motion to water entering the emitter tube. A pop-up sprinkler is also disclosed in which the emitter tube is mounted on a plunger which is displaceable in

10 a barrel, the emitter tube protruding through an opening at the end of the barrel.

The emitter tube 10 is designed to perform a whiplash-type of action in vertical planes while rotating about its vertical axis. The tube 10 will thus move to and fro in a vertical plane which is continually rotating as a result of rotational action of the

15 water stream within the tube 10. the emitter tube 10 of the present invention is designed to operate with an increased internal water pressure, and thus velocity while limiting the frequency of the oscillating to and fro whiplash-type movements of the emitter tube 10. In this way, a greater distance of throw is obtained with the emitter tube 10 of the invention relative to a prior art emitter tube as disclosed in

the above United States patent.

With reference to the drawings, the current invention teaches an emitter tube 10 for use in such irrigation systems which is characterised in that a base zone 10a of the emitter tube 10 is provided with a greater wall thickness than the tube 10 towards the free end 10b thereof. Thus in the arrangement illustrated, the wall thickness of the emitter tube 10 tapers evenly from a relatively thick base zone 10a to a relatively thin free end 10b.

10 The above arrangement results in less flexibility at the base section 10a of the tube to permit the use of higher irrigation water pressures, without an increase in the frequency of oscillation of the tube 10 in use.

In the arrangement shown, the inner diameter of the tube remains constant while the outer profile is tapered as described above. In this case, the total length the tube is 177mm, and the wall thickness at the base 10a thereof is in the order of 3mm, and tapers evenly to a wall thickness at the extremity of the tube which is in the order of 0.5mm. It has been found that many variations of the arrangement above are possible. For example, in certain instances, not shown, the inside diameter of the tube 10 could taper from a relatively large diameter at the base thereof to a smaller diameter at the free end thereof, while the outer profile of the tube could be of constant wall thickness, or also tapered to provide a desired result.

In a further alternative, not shown, the tube 10 could be stepped at intervals along its length so as to reduce in wall thickness from the base 10a to the free end 10b thereof.

- 5 In a further alternative arrangement shown schematically in Figure 3, wherein an intermediate section 10c of the tube which is disposed between the end section 10b and the base section 10a of the tube 10 is provided with a reduced wall thickness. This renders the intermediate section 10c of the tube more flexible to induce flexing of the tube in this section 10c in use. The end section 10b of the tube will likewise  
10 be flexible to perform a whiplash-type of action during oscillation of the tube 10. This tube therefore mimics the actual whiplash-type of movement of a prior art tube, in a controlled fashion. Thus the length and flexibility of the intermediate section 10c and the end section 10b can be pre-selected to give a predetermined performance. For example by varying the flexibility of the intermediate section  
15 10c, the frequency of oscillation can be varied.

It has been found that with the tube 10 described above, one or more of the following benefits will accrue :

- 20 1. An increased radius of throw has been experienced with a more uniform water distribution. It has been found that because the emitter tube 10 is relatively rigid, it resists flexing thus reducing oscillating speed and

maintaining larger droplet sizes for a further throw of irrigation water.

2. With such an increase in the radius of throw, a reduction of the infield infrastructure accrues and results in a reduction in the cost of this system.

5

3. The expected improved distribution renders the use of the sprinkler head shown in Figure 2, possible on a low riser.

10

4. The wall thickness of the tube 10 minimizes the possibility of blow-outs caused by excess air during the start up of this system. A blow out normally occurs when there is excessive air in the system that cannot escape fast enough and the tube 10 is then inflated causing damage thereto.

15

5. The expected increase in the radius of throw allows for wider spacings on low risers further reducing costs. In a irrigation system, the spacings between irrigation heads, Figure 2, of 12 x 12 meters or 12 x 14 meters on a low riser (60 to 90 cm) are possible. The spacings of 15 x 15 meters on tall risers could be achieved.

20

6. Reduction in labour costs results due to the fact that less equipment is required to be moved during the harvest of some crops.

7. A reduction in labour cost also results due to the fact that less equipment may be required to be moved on a movable system.
- 5 8. New applications for the sprinkler shown in Figure 2 are possible, for example used as Side rolls on irrigation machines.
9. A system utilising the emitter in Figure 1 should exhibit better wind resistance due to larger droplets with a higher velocity.
- 10
10. With the emitter tube in Figure 1, a curved droplet trajectory is achieved reducing dry areas behind obstacles such as trees.

Clearly many variations of the tube are possible as mentioned above without

15 departing from the principles set out in the consistory clauses.

**Claims**

1. An emitter tube suitable for an irrigation system, the tube being of  
5 resiliently flexible material having a base inlet end adapted to be mounted  
and a free outlet end adapted to be un-mounted, the arrangement being such  
that, with liquid flowing at a sufficient rate through the emitter tube,  
hydraulic forces exerted by the flowing liquid on the tube cause the outlet  
end continuously to move about, further having a base section adjacent the  
10 base inlet end and an end section downstream from the base section wherein  
the end section is of greater flexibility than the base section.
2. The emitter tube according to claim 1 wherein the base section of the  
emitter tube has a wall thickness which is greater than that of the end  
15 section.
3. The emitter tube according to claim 1 or claim 2 wherein the wall thickness  
of the emitter tube tapers from the base section to the free outlet end.
- 20 4. The emitter tube according to claim 1 or claim 2 wherein the wall thickness  
of the emitter tube is stepped at one or more intervals along its length so as  
progressively to reduce in wall thickness.

5. The emitter tube according to any one of claims 1 to 4 wherein the outer diameter of the tube is substantially constant, while the inner passage of the tube tapers from a large diameter at the base inlet end of the emitter tube to a smaller diameter at the outlet end.
6. The emitter tube according to any one of claims 1 to 5 comprising a base section, and an end section and an intermediate section disposed between the base section and the end section, the arrangement being one wherein the intermediate section is of greater flexibility than the base section.
7. The emitter tube according to claim 6 wherein the end section is of greater flexibility than the intermediate section.
8. The emitter tube according to claim 6 or claim 7 wherein the intermediate section defines a waist portion of reduced diameter.
9. The emitter tube according to any one of claims 1 to 8 wherein the inner diameter of the tube remains substantially constant while the outer profile of the tube reduces in wall thickness from the base section towards the outlet end.

10. The emitter tube according to any one of claims 1 to 9 wherein the emitter tube has a overall length of approximately 177mm, the outer diameter at the base inlet end is approximately 10mm, and the outer diameter at the outlet end is approximately 6mm.

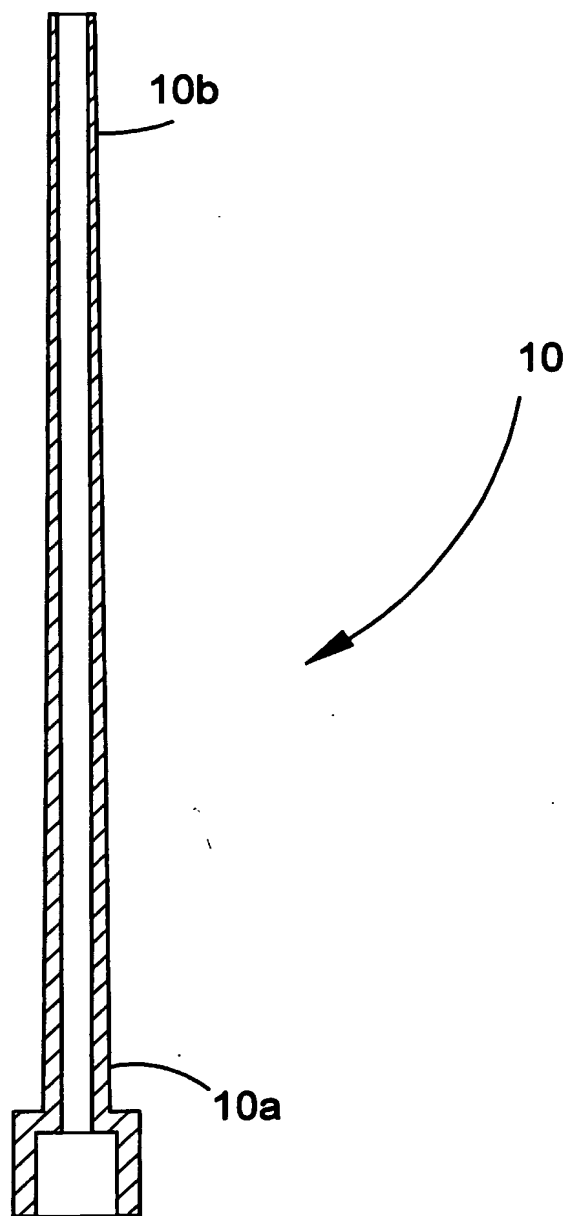
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11. The emitter tube according to claim 10 wherein the tube tapers evenly between the base inlet end and the outlet end.

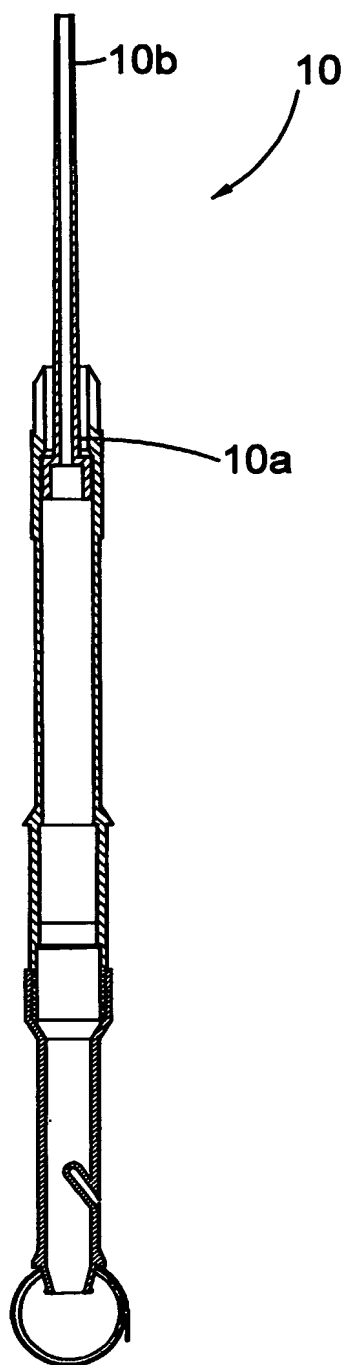
12. The emitter tube according to claim 10 or claim 11 wherein the inner  
10 diameter of the emitter tube is approximately 5mm constantly along the length of the emitter tube.

13. An emitter tube for an irrigation system substantially as herein described and exemplified with reference to the accompanying drawings.

15

FIGURE 1

2/3

FIGURE 2

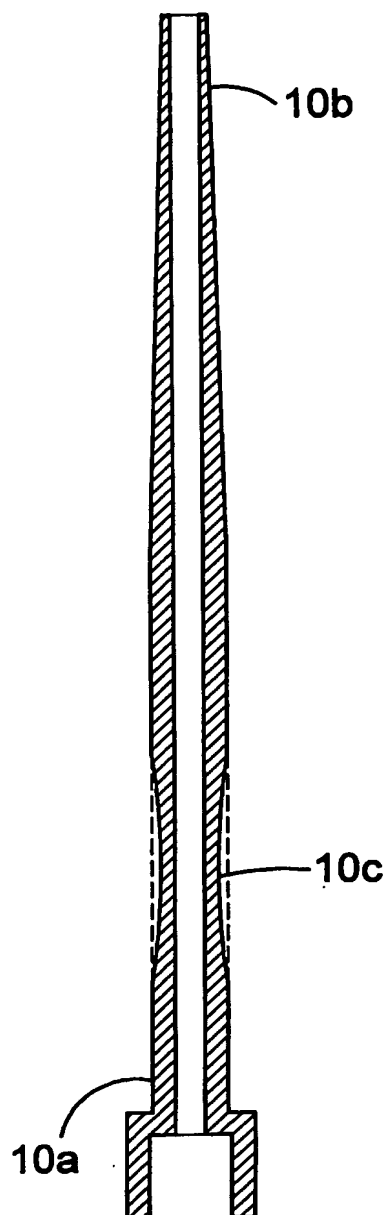


FIGURE 3

## INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

Internat Application No

PCT/ZA 03/00048

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER  
IPC 7 B05B3/00

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

## B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

IPC 7 B05B

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practical, search terms used)

EPO-Internal, PAJ

## C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category *	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X	US 199 816 A (FISKE) 29 January 1878 (1878-01-29) the whole document ---	1, 13
A	GB 2 035 933 A (KLEINDIENST & CO) 25 June 1980 (1980-06-25) page 2, line 71 - line 78 ---	2, 3, 9
A	US 6 050 501 A (O'ROURKE JAMES P) 18 April 2000 (2000-04-18) column 3, line 55 -column 4, line 4 -----	1, 4

☐ Further documents are listed in the continuation of box C.☒ Patent family members are listed in annex.

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# INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

Information on patent family members

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